

DISABLED WORKERS

The majority of physically and mentally impaired workers can carry out duties as well as their unimpaired colleagues. Studies have shown that disabled persons suffer fewer injuries, lose fewer working days and are absent fewer days from work due to injury than non-disabled employees.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 implies that employers must pay particular attention to the requirements of disabled employees and where appropriate monitor at regular intervals their ability for the work in which they are employed. Some work situations will obviously be unsuitable for persons with certain types of disability. These situations should be identified early due to the legislative requirement on employers to carry out risk assessment for the workplace and work activities, which require regular monitoring and review. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is an act of parliament which makes it unlawful to discriminate against people in respect of their disabilities in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport.

The premises and workstations should be organised in such a way so as to accommodate wheelchair users. Workstations may need to be specially adapted to meet the individual's needs and DSE assessments should help identify any problems. Special consideration should be given to planning an evacuation of disabled persons in an emergency. Designated persons should be made responsible for ensuring safe passage out of the building of disabled employees as well as visitors. Precautionary measures might include providing flashing lights for those with hearing difficulties to warn them of danger, personal alarms for those with sight impairment or evacuation transfer chairs for those in wheelchairs.

Traffic routes used by people in wheelchairs should be wide enough to allow unimpeded access and ramps should be provided where necessary. In some situations people in wheelchairs may be at greater risk than people on foot. Special measures might have to be considered to reduce risk where vehicles and pedestrians cannot be segregated and adequate account should be taken of people with impaired sight or hearing. Where possible, car-parking facilities near to entrances should be provided and clearly marked for use by disabled persons. All these areas should all be addressed as part of the risk assessment exercise.

Where the disabled workers job entails lone working special arrangements will need to be in place to check on their safety and well being.

Should the disability be less obvious, such as mental illness, the general duty of care differs in that the element of unpredictability may have to be considered. This may involve increasing the level of supervision and work planning. Other considerations such as photosensitivity may have to be taken into account where this might cause adverse reaction.